

THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN THE UNITED STATES: PAST AND PRESENT*

Gary A. Kreps

Department of Sociology
College of William and Mary
Williamsburg, Virginia 23183, USA

The paper begins by providing a historical overview of wartime and peacetime emergency preparedness in the United States in terms of major historical trends and unresolved issues which preceded the establishment of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in 1979. With the unresolved issues serving as a historical backdrop, FEMA's contemporary role in the federal emergency management system is then examined to see what progress toward their resolution is being achieved. The paper closes with a brief comment on what the historical evolution of federal emergency management in the United States suggests about what can and cannot be accomplished.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was created as an independent unit in mid-1979 following a major reorganization of federal emergency management programs in the United States.¹ The reorganization was the outgrowth of general dissatisfaction during the Carter Administration with federal disaster mitigation, preparedness, and response activities. The establishment of FEMA, with an emphasis on integrated emergency and hazards management, represented a potential turning point in the history of emergency management in the United States. But as will

* This paper was presented before the Research Committee on Disasters Program (Session on Comparative Evolution of Disaster Planning) at the 12th World Congress of Sociology meeting in Madrid, Spain (July 9-13, 1990). Work on the paper was supported, in part, by National Foundation Grant No. CES-8703518. Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

be discussed below, this most recent federal reorganization had been preceded by several others since World War II. All of these reorganizations were motivated by a common desire to reduce confusion and improve the performance of the federal government. The historical question becomes as follows: have federal reorganizations been beneficial for emergency management?

In addressing this question, I begin with an overview of wartime and peacetime emergency management in the United States prior to the creation of FEMA in 1979. That overview concludes with a discussion of several unresolved issues which had become central to federal emergency management by that time. With these issues serving as a historical backdrop, I then take a contemporary look at FEMA's role in the federal emergency management system to see if and how these same issues are being addressed. My intent in all of this is very specific: I wish to place current concerns about FEMA in a broader historical context to highlight the fact that they predate the agency's creation and are to some extent beyond the agency's control. I conclude briefly by commenting on what the historical evolution of federal emergency management in the United States implies about its potential.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT²

I will speak primarily about post World War II developments in war-related and peacetime emergency management³ in the United States, respectively, and then highlight several underlying themes from this historical discussion. These themes will be elaborated further in a following discussion of FEMA's contemporary role in the federal emergency response system.

War-related Emergency Management

War-related civil emergency preparedness dates back to World War I, when for the first time it became possible for an enemy to attack civilian and industrial facilities by air. Following the war, the first and very limited effort in emergency preparedness was carried out under military sponsorship. World War II brought considerable attention to the problem of civil defense, and it gave the United States considerable experience with industrial and military mobilization during an actual emergency situation. As a

result of that experience, the National Security Resources Board (NSRB) was established and reported directly to the President. Heavy emphasis was given by NSRB to continuity of government, national resource planning, and industrial and economic mobilization during wartime.

Following the war, intermittent attention also was given to the problem of civil defense organization at the federal level. An Office of Civil Defense Planning was established in the Department of Defense (DOD) in March, 1948. However, the President decided that a permanent civil defense office was not needed and, in 1949, he transferred that responsibility to the NSRB. Not long afterward however, stimulated largely by the growing concerns about nuclear war, an NSRB review of civil defense led to the creation (in late 1950) of the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) within the Executive Office of the President. This action was soon followed by the enactment of the Federal Civil Defense Act of 1950, which established FCDA as an independent agency. The FCDA remained a separate federal agency until 1958. This development was necessary because the NSRB was not designed to carry out the operational responsibilities required by U.S. involvement in military action. Thus during the Korean War, the Office of Defense Mobilization (ODM) was also created as a part of the Executive Office of the President. The President vested in ODM the responsibility for managing the broad economic and production control measures which had been granted to his office by the Defense Production Act of 1950. The creation of ODM, with these important defense mobilization authorities, left the status and role of the NSRB unclear.

With the Korean War nearly over in 1953, the NSRB and ODM were merged into a new Office of Defense Mobilization, which had the added responsibility of managing national stockpiles of strategic materials. The Director of the new ODM became a member of the National Security Council. In effect, all the basic mobilization planning and advisory functions that had been vested in NSRB in 1947 were brought together with the coordination responsibilities that had been exercised by the ODM to meet the mobilization requirements of the Korean War. The ODM was given added functions in the mid-1950s, and by 1955 the responsibility for coordinating all major federal emergency preparedness programs except civil defense had been concentrated in ODM.

From 1953-58 there were two major federal agencies concerned with war-related emergency management: the Office of Defense Mobilization (ODM) and the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA). The ODM was concerned primarily with developing mobilization plans to meet conventional war conditions, with gradual attention also being given to the consequences of nuclear attack. Its approach assumed wide use of federal agencies which necessarily would carry out mobilization functions at the federal level. The FCDA based its population protection plans on the assumption that an emergency would start with a nuclear attack on the United States. Its approach was to work closely with state and local civil defense officials. This was in accordance with the Civil Defense Act of 1950, which declared that the responsibility for civil defense should be vested primarily in the states and their political subdivisions.

Both ODM and FCDA delegated responsibilities to other federal units and this created problems of duplicating or conflicting functions. These organizational problems, the overlapping responsibilities of the two agencies, and increasing concern about the threat of nuclear war led to a major reorganization in 1958. The possible benefits of integrating programs of ODM and FCDA had become apparent by the late 1950s and in 1958 all major war-related emergency preparedness programs at the federal level were consolidated in a new Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (OCDM), located in the Executive Office of the President.

The coordinating responsibilities for civil defense and mobilization planning were therefore placed in a direct and close relationship to the President. However, the ability of a single agency to effectively manage diverse government activity in war-related emergency management was uncertain. Simply put, it proved very difficult to develop an integrated nonmilitary defense program that was responsive to both nuclear and conventional war, especially one that would be adequately funded by Congress. So after considerable review and discussion over the next three years, there was another reorganization of war-related emergency management in 1961. Hence, Civil Defense responsibility was largely assigned to the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) in the DOD. However, some important civil defense as well as other emergency management functions were retained by the OCDM and what became its successor organization, the Office of Emergency Planning (OEP), later

called the Office of Emergency Preparedness. These included determining appropriate civil defense roles for federal agencies, overall coordination of federal civil defense, continuity of government, and national resource mobilization planning.

Several rationales appeared to underlie the reorganization of 1961. First, it was argued that OCDM had become too operational and was not functioning at a sufficiently broad level to provide support for the President. Second, it was reasoned that the closest possible integration between military and civilian defense would be needed in a major war, and that the Defense Department (DOD) had substantial resources that could be used to strengthen the civil defense program. Third, it was suggested that a civil defense program housed in DOD would receive more generous support from Congress.

Subsequent events indicated that the delegation of a substantial civil defense responsibility to the DOD resulted in a loss by the Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP) of policy control and influence over civil defense programs. It also resulted in a duplication of field offices. And while DOD resources became useful in supporting civil defense programs, DOD auspices did not improve Congressional allocations for civil defense. Notwithstanding loss of policy control and influence, the OEP was active during the 1960s. In 1964 it issued the National Plan for Emergency Preparedness as well as a sample state plan for emergency management of resources. In that same year, the President approved the concept of an Emergency Office of Defense Resources to manage federal resources during an actual emergency.

On the Civil Defense side, a major fallout shelter program was initiated in 1962, with interest in shelters reaching a peak during the Cuban missile crisis. The OCD continued the mandated civil defense preparedness assistance programs for state and local governments and sustained a modest program of research on nuclear weapons and disaster research during the 1960s. Both of these efforts continued in the face of modest and slightly declining budgets. By the early 1970s, specific emphasis was placed by OCD on peacetime as well as wartime emergencies. The early 1970s also brought new emphasis on what was called on-site (community) assistance. The concept of dual use of people, planning, and resources was basic to this effort. By 1974 there was an emphasis on crisis relocation planning and contingency planning to evacuate

populations from high risk during periods of international tension. As a consequence, OCD was transformed into the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency in 1972, reporting to the Secretary of Defense.

In the spring of 1970, the President directed that a careful study be made of the relationship between civil defense and natural disasters. The requirement for this study resulted from inadequate coordination between OEP and OCD, particularly at state and local levels, in dealing with emergency preparedness. It also reflected increasing concern during the 1960s with federal response to the effects of natural disasters on states and localities. In any event, the major result of still another reorganization was the abolishment of the Office of Emergency Preparedness in 1973.

The Federal Preparedness Agency (FPA) was established in the General Services Administration, and the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration (FDAA) was established in the Department of Housing and Urban Development to carry out functions transferred from OEP. The Office of Civil Defense (by now the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency) was not affected by the reorganization. A significant outcome of this reorganization was that for the first time since 1949, there was no official charged with broad emergency management responsibilities either within the Executive Office of the President or as a member of the National Security Council. There appeared to be no systematic analysis underlying this reorganization decision. The stated rationale was that the size of the Executive Office needed to be reduced, and that some of OEP's functions were of an operational nature and could properly be decentralized. In theory, the Director of the new FPA retained the broad policy authority for civil defense programs that was previously vested in the Director of OEP. But as a practical matter, the Director of FPA had very little influence on civil defense policies and programs.

This reorganization also meant that all three major agencies concerned with emergency management (FPA, FDAA, DCPA) maintained their own separate regional offices. This meant that state and local officials were required to deal with at least three sets of federal regional officials on closely related substantive issues. State and local dissatisfaction with the fragmentation of federal emergency management grew substantially after the 1973 reorganization. This mounting dissatisfaction contributed greatly

to Congressional activity during 1976-77, which led ultimately to the most recent reorganization and the creation of FEMA.

Peacetime Emergency Management

Providing disaster assistance to victims and impacted communities became a major responsibility of FEMA in 1979 because of its absorption of the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration. This responsibility, which continues to the present time, involves providing specific types of aid and coordinating similar efforts by other federal agencies and voluntary relief agencies. The types of assistance offered are many, from grants to the rehabilitation of essential public facilities and loans to communities, to temporary housing, unemployment assistance, food coupons, and grants to individuals. The kinds and amounts of assistance available in Presidentially declared disasters have expanded considerably since 1950.

Prior to the 1950 enactment of Public Law 81-875, there was no permanent federal program of disaster assistance to states and localities in the United States. Private voluntary agencies such as the American National Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and many others, bore the primary responsibility for disaster relief; and state and local governments coped as best they could with disaster impacts. The only alternative to the limited assistance of private agencies or state and local governments was appealing to the federal government for special disaster assistance. As early as 1803, the federal government recognized a responsibility for disaster assistance when other public and private resources were inadequate. Between 1803 and 1950 over 100 special assistance acts were passed by Congress. These laws were all enacted after a disaster and in response to a specific event. For these reasons, there were frequent delays before federal assistance reached impacted areas, and the nature of the assistance was designated for only selected purposes.⁴

While many administrative procedures and financial mechanisms for federal disaster assistance had been developed prior to 1950, it remained for Public Law 81-875 to codify and expand them. This law reinforced the already existing legislative mandate for federal agencies to cooperate in providing disaster assistance (see endnote 4). It also empowered the President to direct and coordi-

nate the use of federal resources following a natural disaster. This grant of explicit power provided the legislative foundation for the idea of a single federal agency responsible to the President for the coordination of response activities.

What amounted to a new emergency management responsibility (coordination) was delegated initially by the President to the Housing and Home Financing Agency, which was an agency that had been created in 1947 to direct federal housing programs. But by 1949 that responsibility had been transferred to the Federal Civil Defense Administration (see earlier discussion of FCDA). In effect, this transfer of responsibility also involved a broadening of authority to foster disaster preparedness at state and local levels. The Executive Order creating the transfer also confirmed a number of procedural principles. The most noteworthy were the supplemental nature of federal assistance, the obligation of states and localities to expend reasonable amounts of funds to help themselves, and the need to make fiscal provisions for dealing with emergencies and disasters. With its expanded authority, FCDA developed a pre-disaster plan encompassing the major federal agencies and a formal understanding with the American National Red Cross at the federal level. In addition, a relief coordinator, for the most part the state civil defense director, was established in most states.

A central argument for housing peacetime disaster programs and authorities in FCDA was the idea of **dual use**: first, that the participation of civil defense organizations in natural disasters would increase their ability to cope following a nuclear attack; and second, that the linkages FCDA had already established with state and local governments for civil defense purposes, combined with the human and material resources it could mobilize, would be very useful for responding to peacetime disasters.

Continuing a trend that had become well established by 1950, federal disaster assistance programs expanded benefits for victims and impacted communities during the next two decades (1953-73). The expansion of benefits often was triggered by a disaster of above average magnitude and scope of impact (such as Hurricane Camille in 1969, San Fernando Earthquake in 1971, and Hurricane Agnes in 1972). But the growth in complexity of peacetime disaster assistance programs arguably was not related to organizational changes during most of this period. Thus assistance for natural

disasters was not a particularly important factor in the previously noted merger of FCDA and the Office of Defense Mobilization which resulted in the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (OCDM). Nor was it a factor in the split that left the Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP) in the Executive Office of the President and placed the operational functions of civil defense in the Defense Department. But since the OEP was given responsibility for coordinating the activities of many other federal agencies in peacetime disasters and emergencies, that responsibility remained in the Executive Office of the President until the reorganization of 1973.

Recall that the 1973 reorganization had led to the fragmentation of federal emergency management primarily in three separate agencies (FPA, FDAA, and DCPA). And just as was the case for war-related emergency management, for the first time in almost twenty years peacetime emergency management was outside the Executive Office of the President. Moreover, the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration (FDAA) was embedded in a Department (Housing and Urban Development) with which it had only limited affinity (except for the Federal Insurance Agency). That problem was overcome with the creation of FEMA in the most recent reorganization, but it too remains outside of the Executive Office of the President.

HISTORICAL THEMES IN U.S. EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

The history of emergency management in the United States prior to the establishment of FEMA reveals several general themes and related issues. First, organizational arrangements for emergency management had been changed several times since 1950, with uncertain results. Most of the organizational changes involved the war-related or national security aspects of federal emergency management. The key issue related to attempts to create links between civil defense—defined as largely a state and local responsibility since the Civil Defense Act of 1950—and remaining wartime civil emergency preparedness responsibilities (e.g., continuity of government, national resource and economic mobilization planning) of the federal government. The merging of these activities in the 1958 reorganization (with the establishment of OCDM) was not sustained, and they remained largely separated from 1961 to the creation of FEMA.

Second, the capability of potential adversaries to inflict casualties and damage on the United States had grown substantially since 1950. However, changes in the potential magnitude of the threat had not been accompanied by a growth in attention to war-related civil emergency preparedness measures. Quite the contrary, civil defense and other war-related emergency management programs had static or declining budgets over most of the 30 year period prior to the establishment of FEMA. The central issues related to the effectiveness of civil defense preparedness in a thermonuclear environment and the budget requirements for maintaining a realistic wartime emergency preparedness capability.

Third, during the 1964-80 period, in particular, federal natural disaster assistance programs expanded to the point where they represented hundreds of millions of dollars or more annually. As evidenced by the creation of FEMA, this expansion had become an important consideration in reorganizing federal emergency management. There is no question, however, that the relationship between peacetime and war-related emergency management had varied historically. The potential benefits of integrating related programs were clearly recognized in the transfer of peacetime disaster responsibilities to the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) in 1953. Still, peacetime and wartime programs were largely separate from 1961 until the establishment of FEMA in 1979. The key issue here relates to dual use of resources for war-related and peacetime emergencies and disasters, particularly when the latter reflect an important set of issues (related mitigation, preparedness, emergency response, and recovery) in their own right.

Fourth, war-related and natural disasters were the major types of hazards considered during the several reorganizations prior to the establishment of FEMA. However, growing concentrations of populations and physical structures, and expanded use of new technologies such as nuclear power, had resulted in growing vulnerabilities to a wide range of possible emergencies (e.g., peacetime nuclear accidents, terrorism, disruption of essential resources and services). Concern over these types of emergencies was growing, and this was reflected in the broad emergency management mission of FEMA. The agency's responsibility for an expanding number of hazards raised questions about its role relative to other

federal agencies and departments that also dealt with these hazards.

Finally, the importance attached to peacetime and wartime emergency management programs had fluctuated over the years, depending on such disparate factors as the "random" occurrence of major disaster events, Executive and Congressional interest, and changing domestic and international conditions. Both the visibility and status of emergency management appeared to be affected most significantly by the reorganization of 1973 which, in effect, removed emergency management from the Executive Office of the President for the first time in over twenty years. The reorganization which established FEMA certainly increased the visibility of emergency management, but it remained a separate federal agency. Its status, authority, and influence relative to other federal agencies and departments was uncertain.

FEMA and the Federal Emergency Management System

Using the above issues to organize the discussion which follows, this section examines the extent to which the recent history of FEMA and the federal emergency management system has made progress with respect to resolving these issues. For background materials, I rely primarily on (1) May and Williams' (1986) excellent description and analysis of FEMA from its founding until the mid-1980s and (2) a series of evaluation reports on FEMA by the Government Accounting Office (GAO) which date from the early to late 1980s (see the listing under references). I pointedly do not intend to evaluate FEMA's performance. Rather, I seek to unravel what the historical evolution of the federal emergency management implies about progressive change in the system.

Has Integration of Civil Defense and Other Wartime Preparedness Programs Been Achieved?

In the bureaucratic sense, the answer is yes. Five federal agencies were combined with the creation of FEMA in 1979. Two of these five agencies—the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency from the Department of Defense and the Federal Preparedness Agency from the General Services Administration—had previously handled civil defense and other wartime preparedness programs separately. But the reality, at least in the early years of FEMA's existence, lagged behind the bureaucratic resolution. In the begin-

ning the major subunits of FEMA were not housed in the same facility. Then almost immediately following its establishment a new administration [Reagan, 1980] came into office. Progress in integrating previously separate agencies was therefore slow. The Government Accounting Office (U.S. Comptroller General, 1983a) soon complained that FEMA's five major subunits were operating independently and that FEMA was only a shell of a new structure.

With respect to civil defense and other wartime preparedness programs, recall that consolidation had been tried before (1958) with the merger of the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) and Office of Defense Mobilization (ODM) in a new Office of Civil Defense Mobilization (OCDM). That implementation appeared to fail because of the inherent difficulty of mixing diverse activities, and also because Congressional support was lacking. In less than three years civil defense was sent back to the Department of Defense (it was now called the Office of Civil Defense). Recall also that some initiatives were implemented during the period of separation which followed. Civil defense maintained a major shelter program during much of the 1960s, began crisis relocation planning in the 1970s, and over time became increasingly involved with peacetime disasters and on-site assistance. The Office of Emergency Preparedness (the predecessor of OCDM) implemented national preparedness planning during the 1960s, and it played a federal coordination role for peacetime disasters in the late 1960s until its abolishment in 1973.

Given these apparent accomplishments, the major reorganization of 1973 makes some historical sense. Separation of civil defense and other war-related preparedness was sustained. It was at least arguable that the Office of Emergency Preparedness was abolished from the Executive Office of the President because it was no longer needed. Civil Defense would remain in the Defense Department (it would be called the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency); other war-related preparedness programs would be housed separately in the General Services Administration (the agency designation would be the Federal Preparedness Agency); and peacetime disaster programs would be housed in the Department of Housing and Urban Development (the agency designations would be the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration and the already existing Federal Insurance Administration).

But the logic of separation was not compelling much longer. Recall that DCPA, FPA, and FDAA all maintained their own regional offices. State and local officials expressed increasing concern about having to deal with three separate regional offices. With this result: After 15 years of separation, the Congress and a new administration with a technical/managerial bent [Carter, 1976] repeated the integration attempt of an earlier period by creating FEMA. In contrast to the reorganization of 1958, however, the new lead agency would not be attached to the Executive Office of the President.

With respect to this most recent merging of civil defense and other wartime preparedness programs, the historical context of reorganization was quite different. Where in the late 1950s and early 1960s peacetime emergency management was a sort of add-on for civil defense and other wartime preparedness programs, it by now had come into its own as a major component of the federal emergency management response system. Stated another way, such units as the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration and Federal Insurance Administration (both in the Department of Housing and Urban Development prior to the establishment of FEMA) represented new ways of meeting the **operational** responsibilities of the federal government for peacetime disasters and emergencies.

This meant that the mission of FEMA as the new lead agency was more diverse than any of its predecessors. That mission now includes among other things disaster relief, earthquake hazards reduction, flood insurance, crime insurance, fire protection and control, civil defense programs, programs for continuity of government and post-attack economic recovery, emergency resources management, guidance for stockpiling strategic materials, off-site emergency planning for nuclear facilities, oversight of dam safety, risk assessment for terrorist incidents, and selected emergency response activities related to toxic spills.

Given this highly diverse mission, is the successful merging of civil defense and other wartime emergency management programs more likely now than it was before? I think it is more likely because the **preparedness** interests of civil defense and wartime programs are more common than competitive vis-a-vis FEMA's major **operational** responsibilities for peacetime emergency management. Stated another way, the fault-line at FEMA is not civil defense

versus wartime preparedness, but the increasing marginality of both relative to FEMA's major responsibilities for peacetime emergencies and disasters.

FEMA has now lasted for over a decade. But in what appears to be a historical cycle of consolidation and separation of the federal emergency management system, it would not be surprising to, in the near future, see civil defense and other wartime functions continue to be housed in the same agency and engaged primarily in federal preparedness activities; yet become separated from peacetime mitigation, preparedness, and response programs. These latter programs have a much more operational character, necessarily involve greater contact with states and localities, and attract more sustained Congressional attention. The above, albeit new, mode of separation would be even more likely during a sustained period of decreasing international tensions.

In considering this possibility, it might be argued that separating peacetime disaster **operations** from wartime **preparedness** programs would be a mistake, principally because such separation would remove the historical federal funding base provided by the latter to the former. There is, of course, no question that some level of federal funding for wartime preparedness programs will always exist. But history also suggests that such funding will be quite modest, even when war-related civil preparedness programs are housed in the Department of Defense. This argument also implies that peacetime preparedness programs should be add-ons to war-related ones. But given the much more frequent occurrence of peacetime emergencies and disasters, one might respond that the reverse should be the case.

Is the Budgeting for Civil Defense and Other Wartime Preparedness Programs Sufficient?

What is included here are population protection (fallout shelters and evacuation) during a nuclear attack (state and local responsibilities with federal cost-sharing), and also preparedness for continuity of government, industrial mobilization, materials stockpiling, and economic stabilization in the event of a national crisis or war (primarily federal responsibilities). Exclusive of special disaster relief and insurance funds, FEMA's entire budget is only about 500 million US dollars. Thus the amount of money

allocated to civil defense and other wartime preparedness programs is modest at best (about 300 million US).

As I noted in a review article a few years ago on crisis relocation planning (Kreps 1984), FEMA's modest budget for civil defense and other war time preparedness programs is the pattern since 1950 despite the rapidly spiraling arms race of the last 40 years. Periodically there have been efforts to increase it by varying amounts, but the overall budget has been relatively static in constant dollars. The push for more funds by the Reagan Administration in the early 1980s was predictable, as was the result of essentially no increase. The reason the budget for population protection and other civil preparedness programs has been static is quite simple: A much larger program lacks both technical feasibility and a sustained political constituency. The result is much paper planning, considerable indifference at all levels of government, and, as was the case most recently with crisis relocation planning (CRP), frequently direct opposition at state and local levels.

The limited budgeting for war-related civil preparedness programs is sufficient because there is not a great deal more that can be done in this area. Any semblance of a blast shelter program would cost several hundred billion dollars, be a threat to peace, and generate enormous political resistance. The planned evacuation of cities (termed crisis relocation planning as discussed below) is necessarily provocative and expensive as well, and it is highly questionable on social, technical, and political grounds. It is true that the Soviet Union purportedly spends several times more on civil defense than the United States. But the difference speaks more to the relative power of historical symbols than to greater enthusiasm for the defensive or strategic utility of civil defense.⁵

Is Dual Use of Federal Resources for War-related and Peacetime Emergency Management Feasible and Practical, Particularly When Peacetime Emergencies and Disasters Reflect Major Problems in Their Own Right?

The idea of dual use of federal resources was brought to the forefront after the controversy over crisis relocation planning (CRP) in the early 1980s. Crisis relocation planning called for massive evacuation of urban centers with designated host areas and evacuation centers operating for extended periods of time. It was supposed to be a collaborative effort involving the federal

government, all of the states, and 3000 localities. Even though funding for the program was quite limited, it generated major public opposition and many complaints from local emergency management professionals. After some initial failed attempts to push localities to use CRP funds in conformity with federal guidelines, FEMA adopted a low profile, passed along the federal CRP funds, and told local officials to use them for emergency planning generally or CRP depending on local circumstances. By 1984 CRP was absorbed within general evacuation planning, and it was no longer a part of the emergency management lexicon (May and Williams 1986).

Dual use was very difficult to implement because crisis relocation planning specifically and civil defense generally was so politicized. As a result, some new terminology emerged in 1987 with the concept of integrated emergency management (IEM). While this concept also called for dual use of preparedness for peacetime and war-related disasters (primarily nuclear attack evacuation planning or CRP), it seemed more reasonable to sell war-related emergency preparedness as an extension from peacetime emergency management rather than the other way around (which was the historical funding pattern). But integrated or not, state and local emergency preparedness remains generally low in the United States, and frequently non-existent in smaller political jurisdictions.⁶

There is no question that peacetime emergencies and disasters reflect major problems in their own right. There is also no question that even these more routine hazards are not major concerns to most people—until they happen. Ironically, the closer you get to those who must deal directly with the immediate problems of disasters—local communities—the more difficult it is to sustain a readiness posture. The reason for this state of affairs is easy to understand. Disasters are much more likely to be considered problems at the national level because they happen more often and their damages and losses pile up in higher numbers. So it is not surprising that the push for emergency planning comes from the top down (from national to regional to local levels). Given this circumstance, is integrating war-related and peacetime emergency preparedness programs the right way to go?

Given the existence of FEMA, it seems a mistake to try to do otherwise, at least formally. But the operational problems of peace-

time emergencies and disasters should be kept in the forefront at state and local levels if the [I think only] reasonable goal of modest general preparedness is to be achieved. In the unlikely event of war, the benefits of peacetime emergency preparedness and/or experience will be in evidence, but they cannot be anticipated before the fact. And should the historical cycle of consolidation and separation of federal emergency management programs be repeated [as implied earlier, I think it will], the likely separation of peacetime disaster operations, which clearly involves shared governance, from wartime preparedness, which is primarily a federal responsibility, will be both feasible and practical.

Given FEMA's Very Broad Emergency Management Mission, Has it Established Necessary Relationships With Other Federal Agencies and Departments Dealing With Peacetime Emergencies and Disasters?

An unpublished inventory by Fritz in 1977 revealed that there were over 100 federal agencies with planning, research, or operational functions related to hazards, emergencies, and disasters.⁷ While the terminology of comprehensive emergency management (CEM) had become a conventional theme at the time of FEMA's establishment (National Governors' Association 1979), its achievement was [and remains] a complex problem, and certainly not one solved simply by a paper organization.

FEMA combined five federal agencies during the initial reorganization in 1979. To repeat from the above, these included the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency (Department of Defense), Federal Preparedness Agency (General Services Administration), Federal Disaster Assistance Administration and Federal Insurance Administration (both from Department of Housing and Urban Development), and the National Fire Protection and Control Agency (Department of Commerce). Obviously, there were many major players left out of the reorganization, such as the Small Business Administration and Farmers Home Administration (disaster loans), the Army Corps of Engineers (flood prevention and control), the Environmental Protection Agency (a range of hazards), and the Department of Energy (nuclear hazards).

Given the above, it is clear that the major thrust of the reorganization was to merge small civil defense and other war-related emergency **preparedness** programs with programs (principally

FDA and FIA) having increasing **operational** responsibilities for natural [primarily] and technological [secondarily] hazards. It was clear that FEMA's federal coordination role related largely to natural and technological hazards. This is illustrated by the agency's involvement in Love Canal (purchase of homes through a complex federal-state arrangement) and the aftermath of Three Mile Island (broadened responsibilities for population evacuation during nuclear emergencies), the creation of a State and Local Programs Directorate in FEMA (a first level unit which included mitigation, planning, and response functions), and FEMA's absorption of the earthquake hazards reduction program (with its strong emphasis on disaster prevention, mitigation, and research) (May and Williams 1986).⁸

A central point developed earlier merits restating here: There is an important fault-line between FEMA as a preparedness organization (tied historically to civil defense and other wartime planning) and FEMA as an operations organization (tied increasingly to a broad range of peacetime hazards, emergencies, and disasters). The preparedness side remains static except as it now extends from modest peacetime planning and training. The operations side has expanded programmatic and coordination responsibilities attached to it, and greater political legitimacy.

How well is each side doing? Witnessed by the relative proportion of GAO reports since 1980, the peacetime operations side is certainly receiving more sustained scrutiny. However, a review of these reports, particularly some of the more recent ones (U.S. Comptroller General 1989a; 1989b), suggests that FEMA is making genuine progress in meeting its operational and coordination responsibilities vis-a-vis states, localities, and other federal agencies and departments dealing with peacetime disasters and emergencies.⁹ On the other hand, certainly the major initiative of the civil defense/wartime preparedness side of FEMA has been crisis relocation planning, although that initiative obviously did not work. It is also obvious that the success or failure of crisis relocation planning was never really in FEMA's hands (U.S. Comptroller General 1984; Kreps 1984).

Is the Status, Authority, and Influence of FEMA the Same, Greater, or Less than its Predecessor Agencies in the Federal Emergency Management System?

Being labeled the lead agency in 1979 was no guarantee of status, authority, and influence in the federal emergency management system. As noted earlier, consolidation had been tried before in the 1950s and abandoned by the early 1960s. And given the unprecedented breadth of FEMA's overall mission, it faced much more severe organizational problems than any earlier lead agency. It might be argued that as an independent agency below the cabinet level, FEMA's status was lower than during most of the 1960s when emergency management was a small coordination agency housed in the Executive Office of the President. But there is little evidence from the historical record that the old Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP) had any more power and influence than FEMA does now.

Indeed, there is little basis for concluding that emergency management, defined narrowly or broadly, has ever had inordinate clout at any level of government. This is because those who have responsibilities in this area necessarily confront generalized indifference most of the time, followed by heightened public concern and political scrutiny just after major events (when most changes in policy are made). At the federal level, FEMA's influence on the peacetime operations side is greater than any predecessor agency, in part because of an improving record of performance, and in part because of the growing legitimacy of emergency management as a professional field.

On the other hand, FEMA's status and influence on the civil defense/wartime preparedness side is lower in comparison with earlier periods. Although civil defense has never been given much priority, attention to the program reached its highest point with the Kennedy shelter initiative of the early 1960s. And even though related budgets have always been much lower than civil defense experts said were needed, a certain protection was provided over the many years when the program was housed in the Department of Defense. Other wartime preparedness programs have had even lower visibility and support than civil defense, and they have been confined largely to paper planning and inventorying.

So the answer to the last question depends, once again, on whether the referent is FEMA's wartime preparedness role or its

peacetime operations role. Recall that the GAO opined some 18 months after FEMA's creation (U.S. Comptroller General 1983a) that its major subunits operated independently within the shell of a new structure. In response, any number of internal reorganizations have been made over the years (May and Williams 1986). These included centralized financial management, regional office consolidation, reductions in overall staffing, the expansion of a national training center with a strong multi-hazards approach, and a host of office realignments. But if a major division remains in FEMA, it lies between wartime preparedness and peacetime operations. Historical circumstances may change this scenario, but at least for now the former is becoming increasingly marginal and the latter is taking on greater importance in the federal emergency management system.

CONCLUSION

The following question was raised in the introduction of this paper: Have recent federal reorganizations been beneficial for emergency management? On the whole, I think the answer is yes. It must be remembered that neither consolidation nor separation of war-related and peacetime emergency programs necessarily is good or bad. It very much depends on the historical circumstances in which one or the other occurs.

The reorganizations of the 1950s, which led ultimately to the merger of civil defense and other war-related programs in 1958, were impelled primarily by the Korean War and a growing nuclear arms race, and not the idea of dual use for peacetime disasters. The reorganizations of the 1960s, which led in 1973 to the complete separation of civil defense, other wartime preparedness programs, and peacetime disaster response programs, were driven largely by increasing federal involvement in peacetime disasters and an expanding mission that was seen as too broad for a small coordinating office working out of the Executive Office of the President. The major reorganization of the late 1970s, which led to the consolidation of civil defense, other war-related preparedness programs, and peacetime disaster response programs in FEMA, resulted primarily from confusion at state and local levels about the difference between wartime preparedness and peacetime operational links with the federal government. Finally, most of the internal reorganizations within FEMA during the 1980s represent

attempts at the federal level to reconcile increasingly marginal civil defense/wartime preparedness programs with demands for more inclusive peacetime emergency operations management (prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery).¹⁰

In what appears to be a continuing cycle, a separation phase might be predicted next in terms of a wartime preparedness and peacetime operations division. How soon that happens depends very much on international events. Rapidly increasing tensions would probably delay any separation because the logic of integrated emergency management (IEM) would become more compelling. A long period of decreasing tensions would probably quicken the pace of separation because first, wartime preparedness would become increasingly marginal within FEMA itself; second, there would still be a need for these programs; and third, just as in the past wartime preparedness programs would not involve major expenditures. In the event of an actual separation, the likely location of civil defense/wartime preparedness programs would be the Department of Defense.

Each of the above reorganizations made (or would make) sense at the time they were (or would be) implemented, and the net effect of the historical cycle of consolidation and separation depicted in this paper has been beneficial for the federal emergency management system. It also must be remembered that there are inherent limits to what that system can accomplish because disasters and emergencies are non-routine social problems (Drabek 1989; Kreps 1989). We would not want wartime disasters to be anything but very non-routine; and their prevention is largely outside the domain of emergency management. With respect to peacetime disasters, attempts at mitigation and preparedness prior to an actual emergency or disaster face indifference to outright opposition; and during or shortly after an actual event, scrutiny and criticism is quite healthy because it keeps emergency management professionals on their toes. The constraints on emergency management are longstanding, and they most certainly predate FEMA and the contemporary federal response system. FEMA can do little about them. But in facing disasters as non-routine social problems, both agency and the broader system are making progress.

NOTES

1. Transferred to the FEMA were the Department of Commerce's U.S. Fire Administration and National Academy for Fire Prevention and Control; federal flood, riot, and crime insurance programs from the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Federal Insurance Administration; the oversight responsibility of the Federal Emergency Broadcast System from the Office of Science and Technology Policy; the functions of the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency in the Department of Defense, the Federal Preparedness Agency in the General Services Administration, and the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration in the Department of Housing and Urban Development; federal functions related to earthquake hazards reduction, dam safety, severe weather emergency readiness plans, natural and nuclear disaster warning systems, and the consequences of terrorist incidents; and, finally, supervision of federal responsibilities related to major civil emergencies.

2. Major portions of the first and second sections of this paper draw directly from an unpublished background report I drafted for the National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council Committee on U.S. Emergency Preparedness (1978-80, chaired by Thomas Drabek). In preparing that earlier report, I drew heavily on a variety of historical reviews and interpretations of civil emergency preparedness and related issues in the United States (especially Haakon Lindjord's historical review for the President's Reorganization Project 1978; and also related materials by Norton 1978 and 1979; Garrett 1979; Defense Civil Preparedness Agency 1975; Mileti 1975; Office of Emergency Preparedness 1972; Jordon 1966; and Gessert, Jordan, and Tashjean 1965).

3. The latter is quite broad and open ended. For example, FEMA currently has assigned responsibility for coordinating federal response to terrorist incidents, peacetime nuclear emergencies, refugee situations, critical shortages of vital supplies, and disruption of essential public services.

4. Some federal agencies were given statutory authority to render assistance for specific kinds of disaster prior to 1950 (e.g., the Bureau of Public Roads and repair of federal highways and bridges, the Army Corps of Engineers and flood control works, and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and reconstruction of

certain public facilities). There was no requirement to coordinate the activities of the above and several other federal agencies until the enactment of Public Law 80-233 in 1947. The act itself related primarily to releasing surplus war materials for disaster aid.

5. The important symbol in the United States is the ability to control nuclear technology. Crisis relocation planning is not the only symbol of such control, witness the historically extensive discussions of limited nuclear war with selective targeting. But in a sense population protection is a less arcane and more visible symbol. Civil defense in the Soviet Union represents a continuing concern with outside attack and invasion. That concern has been reinforced powerfully by historical circumstances. So in both countries civil defense is important as a symbol. However, the reality of nuclear armaments on both sides would make significant population protection unlikely in the event of nuclear war (Kreps 1984).

6. A case in point: A 1988 GAO report (U.S. Comptroller General 1988a) on the West Virginia flood of 1985 indicates that only about 40% of the State's counties had participated in FEMA's program to improve local emergency planning and operations (called Emergency Management Assistance or EMA program). The primary reason appeared to be that counties did not provide the necessary matching funds to meet federal guidelines. And among those participating in the EMA program, there were complaints about the paperwork demands on part-time and volunteer staffs, and little evidence of updating plans in accordance with FEMA guidelines. More broadly, about half of 5600 local jurisdictions (mostly small ones representing about 20% of the population) are not participating in the EMA program. But FEMA is not encouraging greater participation because it does not have the funds to support it.

7. Focusing only on key federal agencies, Petak and Atkinson (1982) later identified some 25 of them with continuing or expanded responsibilities. In dealing with these disparate agencies, FEMA's coordination role is characterized in more functional terms by McLoughlin (1985).

8. FEMA's involvement in floodplain management and earthquake hazards reduction are important cases in point. FEMA has the responsibility for flood insurance and floodplain regulation (tied to 1968 legislation). Most of its funding for floodplain regula-

tion is used to support preparation of flood maps that are required for moving communities from emergency to regular phases of the flood insurance program. Localities have to meet minimal requirements to get on the regular program, then regional FEMA offices monitor them for continuing compliance. FEMA has given the monitoring effort greater attention since a GAO report (U.S. Comptroller General 1982) characterized it as inadequate. The monitoring is hard to accomplish given the size and cutbacks (during the 1980s) of regional staff, the number of localities to be monitored (over 17,000), and cost-sharing problems with many states. FEMA also is designated as the lead federal agency coordinating federal earthquake hazards reduction activities. It was criticized by a GAO report (U.S. Comptroller General 1983b) for not providing leadership and keeping earthquake hazards reduction as a low profile program with the agency. The development, in collaboration with the National Bureau of Standards and the Building Seismic Safety Council (a building industry association), of new seismic standards for building construction has been a major thrust of FEMA in the mid 1980s. But outside of California, where federal/state cooperation is high, federal involvement with states and localities on earthquake hazards reduction has been limited. In large measure, this results from a lack of earthquake awareness in most states and the absence of technical expertise and resources at the regional level (May and Williams 1986).

9. A good example is the GAO's favorable review (1989) of FEMA's Individual and Family Grant (IFG) program. This cost-sharing program provides grants (limit of \$10,000) to individuals and families for disaster related needs and expenses not met by other programs or insurance. The program was designed to work in conjunction with FEMA's temporary housing program and the Small Business Administration's disaster loan program. The states share the financial burden and administer the program, and FEMA assumes responsibility for verifying losses. At this writing, there are no GAO reports on FEMA's most recent operations following Hurricane Hugo and the Loma Prieta earthquake. A preliminary report to the Congress will likely be made by late summer or fall, 1990. The criticisms of FEMA by some victims and state and local officials reported in the press, particularly as they related to Hurricane Hugo, are fairly standard and to be expected following a major regional disaster. These criticisms do not mean

that the progress reported in recent GAO reports is illusory. They do mean that the provision of federal assistance following any large scale disaster is an expensive and complicated process.

10. While internal politics, conflicts, and possible mismanagement within the highest levels of FEMA have been reported in the press during the 1980s, in my judgment these factors are insignificant compared to the broader social and cultural realities that have been described.

REFERENCES

- Defense Civil Preparedness Agency. 1975. *Significant Events in United States Civil Defense History Listed Chronologically, 1916-1974*. Washington, D.C.: Defense Civil Preparedness Agency.
- Drabek, T.E. 1987. *The Professional Emergency Manager: Structures and Strategies for Success*. Boulder, Colorado: Institute for Behavioral Science.
- _____. 1989. "Taxonomy and Disaster: Theoretical and Applied Issues." Pp. 317-345 in *Social Structure and Disaster*, edited by G.A. Kreps. Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press.
- Garrett, R. 1979. *Civil Defense for the 1980s—Current Issues*. Washington, D.C.: Defense Civil Preparedness Agency.
- Gessert, R.A., N. Jordon, and J.E. Tashjean. 1965. *Federal Civil Defense Organization: Rationale for Its Development*. Alexandria, Virginia: Institute for Defense Analysis.
- Jordon, N. 1966. *U.S. Civil Defense Before 1950: The Roots of Public Law 920*. Alexandria, Virginia: Institute for Defense Analysis.
- Kreps, G.A. 1984. "Symbol and Reality of Civil Defense." *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 2:304-308.
- _____. 1989. "Future Directions in Disaster Research: The Role of Taxonomy." *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 7:215-241.
- _____. Forthcoming. "Organizing for Emergency Management." In *The Principles and Practice of Emergency Management*, edited by T.E. Drabek and G.J. Hoetmer. Washington, D.C.: The International City Management Association.
- May, P.J. and W. Williams. 1986. *Disaster Policy Implementation: Managing Programs Under Shared Governance*. New York and London: Plenum Press.
- McLoughlin, D. 1985. "A Framework for Integrated Emergency Management." *Public Administration Review* 45:165-172.
- Mileti, D.J. 1975. *Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation in the United States: A Research Assessment*. Boulder, Colorado: Institute for Behavioral Science.
- National Governors' Association. 1979. *Comprehensive Emergency Management: A Governor's Guide*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

- Norton, C.F. 1978. *Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Assistance: Federal Organizations and Programs*. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Research Service, 1978.
- _____. 1979. *Emergency and Disaster Preparedness Reorganization* (Issue Brief No. 77118). Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Research Service Major Issues Systems.
- Office of Emergency Preparedness. 1972. *Report to the Congress: Disaster Preparedness*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Emergency Preparedness.
- Petak, W.J. and A.A. Atkinson. 1982. *Natural Hazard Risk Assessment and Public Policy: Anticipating the Unexpected*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- President's Reorganization Project. 1978. *Federal Emergency Preparedness and Response Historical Survey*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Management and Budget.
- U.S. Comptroller General, General Accounting Office. 1982. *National Flood Insurance: Marginal Impact on Floodplain Development, Administrative Improvements Needed* (CED-82-105). Washington D.C.: General Accounting Office.
- _____. 1983a. *The Management of the Federal Emergency Management Agency: A System Being Developed* (GGD-83-9). Washington, D.C.: General Accounting Office.
- _____. 1983b. *Stronger Direction Needed for the National Earthquake Program* (RCED-83-103). Washington, D.C.: General Accounting Office.
- _____. 1984. *The Federal Emergency Management Agency's Plan for Revitalizing U.S. Civil Defense: A Review of Major Plan Components* (NSIAD-84-11). Washington, D.C.: General Accounting Office.
- _____. 1988a. *Disaster Assistance: Response to West Virginia's November 1985 Flood Shows Need for Improvements* (RCED-88-5). Washington, D.C.: General Accounting Office.
- _____. 1988b. *Flood Insurance: Statistics on the National Flood Insurance Program* (RCED-88-155FS). Washington, D.C.: General Accounting Office.
- _____. 1989a. *Disaster Assistance: Program Changes Expedited Delivery of Individual and Family Grants* (RCED-89-73). Washington, D.C.: General Accounting Office.
- _____. 1989b. *Disaster Assistance: Timeliness and Other Issues Involving the Major Disaster Declaration Process* RCED-9-138 Washington, D.C.: General Accounting Office.